

The Writing Process

What makes writing formal?

Whatever type of text you are writing, your aim should always be to express your ideas clearly and in a way that your readers can easily understand.

When you read, notice the kind of language that is used in the type of writing you need to do.

To make your writing more formal, consider:

1. Word choice.

- It is usually best to use standard English words and phrases, that is, those with no label in the dictionary.
- Only use words and phrases marked *formal* if you are sure they are appropriate.
- Avoid anything marked *informal*, *slang*, *offensive*, etc.
- Use suitable synonyms for common words such as *do*, *put*, *get*, *make*. e.g. *Several operations were carried out/performed* (not *done*).
- Words that are frequently used in academic writing are marked **AWL** in the dictionary.

2. Short forms

- Avoid contracted forms (e.g. *haven't*, *I'm*) and abbreviations (e.g. *ad - advertisement*).

3. Sentence structure

- In formal writing you are likely to be expressing complex ideas. To do this you will need to write sentences using relative pronouns (e.g. *which*, *that*), subordinating conjunctions (e.g. *although*, *because*, *if*) and coordinating conjunctions (e.g. *and*, *but*, *or*).
- Very long sentences with many clauses can be difficult to understand. Aim for **clarity**.

Academic writing

This tends to be **impersonal** in style in order to be objective. This makes it sound formal. When you read in your subject, notice how the writers express themselves. The following points may help you in your writing:

- Limit the use of the **first person pronouns** (*I* and *we*). Rather than *In this study I aim to...*, write: *This study aims to...* or *The aim of this study is to...* Look at how *I* and *we* are used in your subject area. Avoid using *you*.
- **Passive forms** are often used as they focus attention on the verb, not the person, e.g. *A study was conducted to see...*; *It can be argued that...*
- Patterns with **it** and **an adjective** are often used: *It is clear that...*; *It is necessary to...*
- **Nouns** are often used as subjects of active verbs: *The results show that...*
- **Complex noun phrases** with prepositions are very common: *The advantages of X are...*; *the use of light treatment in 95 patients with...*

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The writing process

Writing a summary

A summary is a shortened version of a text containing only the key information. The aim is to present readers with a short, clear account of the ideas in the text. Summary writing is an important skill in both academic and business contexts. Follow the steps in order to write a successful summary.

Preparing to write

Select the key information:

- Read the text carefully, looking up words you don't know. It is important to understand the whole sequence of the argument. Ask yourself what the text is about. Think about the purpose of your summary and what your readers need to know.
- Highlight the **key information** (the main ideas). Omit details such as examples, quotations, information in brackets, repetitions, figures of speech and most figures and statistics.
- Underline any information which you are not sure about. Only include it in your summary if you have space.
- Make notes on the key information in your own words.

Write a first draft of your summary using the information you have selected.

- **Organize** the ideas in your notes into a logical order. This need not be the same order as in the original text, but must show the same argument.
- **Condense** the information where possible.
- **Express the ideas in your own words.** This will usually be shorter than the original. Rewrite phrases in the text, but keep any **key terms** from the subject area.
- Do not give your own opinion on the topic.

Writing an argument essay

Many essays that you have to write, whether during your school or college course or in an examination, will require you to present a reasoned argument on a particular issue. This will often be based on your research into the

topic, but some questions may ask you to give your opinion. In both cases your argument must be clearly organized and supported with information, evidence and reasons. The language tends to be formal and impersonal.

Showing your position

When you write an argument essay, you can show what your opinion is on the issue or question without using personal phrases such as *I think...* or *In my opinion,...* You can do this

by choosing words carefully as you write. Some examples are given below. Look out for more in your reading.

Language bank

Adjectives

important, major, serious, significant
e.g. An **important** point to consider is...; This was a **highly significant** discovery.

Patterns with It + adjective

clear, likely, possible, surprising, evident
e.g. **It is clear that** the study of space is expensive.
important, difficult, necessary, possible, interesting
e.g. **It is important to** consider the practical effects of these measures.

Adverbs and phrases

clearly, indeed, in fact, of course
generally, usually, mainly, widely
perhaps, probably, certainly, possibly
rarely, sometimes, often
e.g. **Clearly**, this is a serious issue that deserves further study.
This book is **generally** held to be her greatest novel.

Verbs

These help show how certain you are about a point or an argument.

Modal verbs: can, could; may, might; will, would (*the first of each pair is most certain*)
Compare: **I argue that...** (very certain). / **I would argue that...** (not so certain)

It + verb: It appears that, It seems that...

It + passive verb: It can be seen that...; It should/must be noted/emphasized that...

Showing verbs: show, indicate, demonstrate, suggest, imply (*These have a non-human subject*)

Arguing verbs: argue, suggest, consider, conclude (*These can have a human subject e.g. I*)

Linking words and phrases

Firstly (= *I have several points to make*)
Furthermore...; In addition,... Moreover,...
(= *I have another important point*)
However,... (to introduce a counterargument)
Thus,... Therefore,... (to introduce a conclusion)

WRITING A COMPARISON ESSAY

You may often need to **compare** and **contrast** things in exam, academic essays, work and everyday life. Here is an example of how to structure a comparison essay.

Language bank

Similarities

X... Similarly, Y...

Both X and Y...

X... Y also...

Both + plural noun ... e.g. Both types of assessment ...

Like X, Y ... e.g. Like continuous assessment, exams ...

X and Y are similar in that they both...

X is similar to Y in terms of / with regard to...

X resembles Y in that they both...

X is the same as Y.

Differences

X... On the other hand, Y... / Y, on the other hand, ...

Unlike X, Y...

X... In contrast, Y... / While X..., Y...

X..., while Y...

X... However, Y... / X... Y, however, ...

X differs from Y in terms of / with regard to ... (e.g. the conditions for testing)

X is different from / contrasts with Y in that ...

X..., whereas Y... / Whereas X..., Y...

Being more precise:

Similarities

X is almost / nearly / virtually / just / exactly / precisely the same as Y.

X and Y are very / rather / quite similar.

Differences

X is slightly / a little / somewhat smaller than Y.

X is much / considerably smaller than Y.

X and Y are completely / totally / entirely / quite different.

X and Y are not quite / exactly / entirely the same.